



Liberia

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Liberia is a centralized republic, dominated by a strong presidency. The Constitution provides for three branches of government, but no effective system of checks and balances, and presidents traditionally have wielded extraordinary power. Charles G. Taylor, who is of both indigenous and Americo-Liberian ancestry, has led the Government since 1996, when forces under his command emerged dominant after a 7-year civil war. In 1997 Taylor won the presidential election, and his National Patriotic Party (NPP) won three-quarters of the seats in the legislature. The elections were administratively free and transparent, but were conducted in an atmosphere of intimidation, as most voters believed that Taylor's forces would have resumed fighting if he had lost. Most other leaders of the former warring factions subsequently left the country. The bicameral legislature exercises little independence from the executive branch. The judiciary is subject to political influence, economic pressure, and corruption.

The regular security forces include: The Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL); the Liberia National Police (LNP), which has primary responsibility for internal security; the Antiterrorist Unit (ATU), also called the Antiterrorist Brigade (ATB), composed of an elite special forces group; and the Special Security Service (SSS), a large, heavily armed executive protective force. The ATU absorbed Taylor's most experienced civil war fighters, including undisciplined and untrained loyalists. There also are numerous irregular security services attached to certain key ministries and parastatal corporations, the responsibilities of which appear to be defined poorly. The national army, which fought against Taylor's faction during the civil war, has yet to be downsized and restructured as required by the Abuja Peace Accords, due primarily to a lack of funding. In late 2000, a commission to downsize and restructure the army was established with funding allocated at approximately \$100,000 (5 million Id). Several thousand troops deployed in northern counties were fighting armed dissidents; however, there were few troops deployed to maintain security in other rural areas of the country. Fighting intensified during the year between the security forces and the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) rebels. President Taylor called up 15,000 former fighters from the faction he had led during the civil war to combat the growing rebel threat. In 2000 the Government revived the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI), which had become defunct during the civil war. Security forces frequently acted independently of government authority, particularly in rural areas. Members of the security forces committed numerous, serious human rights abuses.

Liberia, with a population of approximately 3,164,000, is a very poor country with a market-based economy that has yet to recover from the ravages of the civil war. Average per capita income is estimated at less than \$200 (10,000 Id). An estimated unemployment rate of 70 percent, a 30 percent literacy rate, the internal displacement of civilians in Lofa and Nimba counties, and the absence of infrastructure throughout the country continued to depress productive capacity, despite the country's rich natural resources and potential self-sufficiency in food. Government officials and former combatants continued to exploit the country's natural resources for personal benefit. Extortion is widespread in all levels of society.

The Government's human rights record remained poor, and there were numerous, serious abuses in many areas. The security forces committed many extrajudicial killings, and they were accused of disappearances of numerous persons. Security forces tortured, beat, and otherwise abused or humiliated citizens. The Government investigated some of the alleged abuses by the security forces; however, offenders rarely were charged or disciplined. Prison conditions remained harsh and sometimes life threatening. Security forces continued at times to use arbitrary arrest and detention, and lengthy pretrial detention remained common. The judicial system, hampered by political influence, economic pressure, inefficiency, corruption, and a lack of resources, was unable to ensure citizens' rights to due process and a fair trial. In some rural areas where the judiciary had not been reestablished, clan chieftains administered criminal justice through the traditional practice of trial-by-ordeal; authorities tacitly condoned this practice. Approximately 20 political prisoners

remained in jail, although some were released during the year. Security forces violated citizens' privacy rights, conducted warrantless searches, harassment and illegal surveillance, and looted homes. The Government restricted freedom of speech and of the press; it detained, threatened, and intimidated journalists. Police forcibly dispersed one student demonstration. Security forces restricted freedom of movement, using roadblocks to extort money from travelers and displaced persons fleeing fighting, primarily in Lofa County. Security forces frequently harassed human rights monitors. Violence and discrimination against women remained problems. The welfare of children remained widely neglected, and female genital mutilation (FGM) continued to increase. Societal ethnic discrimination remained widespread, ethnic differences continued to generate violence and political tensions, and the Government continued to discriminate against indigenous ethnic groups that had opposed Taylor in the civil war, especially the Mandingo and the Krahn ethnic groups. Forced labor persisted in rural areas. Child labor remained widespread, and there were reports of forced child labor. Ritualistic killings also persisted.

Rebels fighting in the north also committed serious human rights abuses.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Political and Other Extrajudicial Killing

Security forces continued to commit extrajudicial killings. Human rights organizations estimate that such killings numbered in the hundreds during the year. Many of the abuses were linked to ongoing violence in Lofa County between security forces and antigovernment dissidents who launched a series of crossborder incursions from Guinea. Fighting intensified during the year between the security forces and the LURD. No perpetrators were arrested or convicted for any of these killings.

In July officers of the Special Operations Division (SOD) of the police allegedly killed an immigration officer in Bong County while attempting to arrest him for extortion. In August three SOD officers were arrested and charged with involvement in the incident; they remained in detention at year's end.

In July the commander of the Kakata town police and another officer were arrested for murder and armed robbery following the ambush of a rubber plantation vehicle. No additional information was available at year's end.

In late October, members of the ATU reportedly detained and tortured two Nigerian men; both men died as a result of their injuries. On November 2, Deputy Minister of Labor Bedell Fahn and five members of the ATU were arrested, and they remained in detention awaiting trial at year's end; two ATU suspects remained at large at year's end. Fahn reportedly had accused the men of stealing the jewelry from his house.

On December 7 in Gbarnga, the police commander shot and killed a fourth grade boy; the police officer said the boy was a thief and announced the shooting publicly. Students rioted to protest the killing; on December 10, police killed two more students during a demonstration in front of the police station. The National Chief of Police ordered the arrest of the police commander who shot the fourth grade student. The Government reported that the police commander remained in detention at year's end; however, human rights NGO's were not granted access to the police commander and were unable to confirm his arrest by year's end.

There were credible reports that government forces as well as members of the Lorma ethnic group continued to harass, intimidate, and kill members of the Mandingo ethnic group in Lofa County. Human rights monitors reported that hundreds of Mandingos were killed during the year. In May Amnesty International reported that security forces, especially the ATU, committed widespread abuses, including killings, torture, and rape, against civilians suspected of supporting armed dissidents in Lofa County (see Section 1.c.). Minister of Information Reginald Goodridge stated he was unaware of any abuses committed by security forces, and he asked Amnesty International to provide more information about the abuses committed by the armed dissidents (see Section 1.c.).

No action was known to have been taken against the police officers responsible for the killing of Nyanqui Luoh in 2000.

At year's end, the Government had not released a report on its November 1999 investigation of the reported killing of as many as 30 Mandingos in Lofa County in August 1999. There was no investigation into nor action taken in the May 1999 death of a security officer allegedly while in detention.

In August unknown persons killed the Chief Financial Officer of the Police Training Academy outside of Monrovia. Police officers were suspected of involvement; however, there was no reported action taken against the responsible persons by year's end.

On January 30, Defense Minister Daniel Chea reported that a Guinean helicopter gunship attacked Solumba, a northern border town, killing at least 10 persons.

There continued to be reports during the year of attacks by fighters based in Liberia on Guinean border towns, which caused numerous deaths. These attacks generally were perpetuated by a combination of government security forces, Revolutionary Front United (RUF) rebels from Sierra Leone, and some Guinean rebels; however, some attacks also were launched by armed Liberian dissidents based in Guinea. In January there was at least one attack reported on a Guinean town close to the Sierra Leonean border.

Rebel forces fighting the Government in Lofa County killed, tortured, and raped civilians. In April in Lofa County, armed dissidents killed Youth and Sports Minister Francois Massaquoi when they shot at his helicopter.

There were no further developments in the November 2000 attacks reportedly in northeastern Nimba, which resulted in numerous deaths; it was unclear whether the rebel incursion was from Guinea or Cote d'Ivoire.

There were no reported developments in the October 2000 case of 12 men arrested for the burning of a mosque and other buildings and the death of 4 persons in a property dispute in Nimba County; the 12 men reportedly remained in detention pending a trial at year's end.

Incidents of ritualistic killings, in which human body parts used in traditional rituals are removed from the victim, continued to be reported (see Section 5). The number of such killings is difficult to ascertain, since police often describe deaths as accidents even when body parts have been removed. Deaths that appear to be natural or accidental sometimes are rumored to have been the work of ritualistic killers (see Section 5). There were no reported developments in the case of two suspects charged with killing and mutilating a 10-year-old girl. A police investigation launched in August 1999 into alleged ritual killings in Harper resulted in the acquittal of one of four defendants; no information was available on the status of the three remaining defendants.

b. Disappearance

Security forces were responsible for numerous disappearances.

For example, a human rights organization reported that security forces detained 24 persons from a truckload of internally displaced persons fleeing fighting in Lofa County in May. It was suspected they were transported to the Gbatala military base in Bong County; however, they have not been seen since.

The whereabouts of seven refugees who were arrested on their return from Guinea in June 2000 remained unknown at year's end. The authorities claimed they were members of an armed dissident faction based in Guinea and were plotting to overthrow the Government and charged them with treason. The men have not been seen since their arrest, and NGO's and relatives believe that they were killed.

Security forces produced suspects whom they had held without charge when the courts issued writs of habeas corpus on the applications of human rights organizations. Their disappearances often were the result of prolonged illegal detention at the Gbatala base (see Section 1.c.).

There were no indications by year's end that the Government carried out its promised investigation of the reported disappearance of Mandingos following the violence in Lofa County in 1999.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The Constitution prohibits such practices; however, government police and security forces frequently tortured, beat, and otherwise abused and humiliated citizens. In some cases, security forces produced suspects whom they had held without charge when the courts issued writs of habeas corpus on the applications of human rights organizations. Such detainees continued to charge that they were tortured while in detention, especially at a security training base in Gbatala. Victims and witnesses reported beatings, torture, killings, and sexual abuse at the base. Despite calls by human rights organizations for the closure of the base, the base remained opened at year's end. A local NGO, the Catholic Affiliated Justice and Peace Commission, tried to investigate claims; however, the Government blocked their efforts and continued to deny them access to Gbatala. There

also were continued reports of beatings and torture by both government security personnel and armed dissidents in Lofa County.

On several occasions, government security personnel harassed, assaulted, and arrested journalists (see Section 2.a.). According to Amnesty International, the security forces targeted and sometimes tortured critics of the Government, including students, journalists, and human rights activists.

Law enforcement personnel, including the security forces, were implicated in numerous reports of harassment, intimidation, and looting. According to Amnesty International, security forces tortured criminal suspects. In May and June, ATU personnel fired on vehicles at security checkpoints in Monrovia; at least one person was shot and injured (see Section 2.d.). In July in Monrovia, officers of the Police Special Operations Division beat and attempted to rob marketers; the National Director of Police intervened and apologized to the marketers. In July the commander of the Kakata town police and another officer were arrested for murder and armed robbery following the ambush of a rubber plantation vehicle. In August in separate incidents, police beat and flogged Congresswoman Ellen King and Senator Armah Jallah, two members of the legislature. Several policemen were arrested after the August incident; however, there was no further action reportedly taken against the policemen by year's end. In September in response to the high incidence of police abuse, the Government held special training seminars on officer conduct and public relations. Also in September, the ATU commander publicly demanded that ATU officers improve their behavior with civilians at checkpoints and stated that offenders would be punished; however, there was no subsequent improvement in police behavior at checkpoints, and no action was known to have been taken against any police officers responsible for such abuses.

In March police forcibly dispersed a student demonstration; numerous persons reportedly were beaten, flogged, or raped (see Section 2.a.). No action was known to have been taken against the responsible police officers by year's end. A panel appointed by university officials completed an investigation into the beatings; however, the panel's findings were not released publicly by year's end.

In late October in Monrovia, members of the ATU reportedly detained and tortured two Nigerian men suspected of stealing jewels from the Deputy Minister of Labor; both men died as a result of their injuries (see Section 1.a.). On November 2, Deputy Minister of Labor Bedell Fahn and five members of the ATU were arrested, and they remained in detention awaiting trial at year's end; two ATU suspects remained at large at year's end. Fahn reportedly had accused the men of stealing the jewelry from his house.

Paul Mulbah, director of the LNP, ordered that off-duty armed security men be removed from the streets and ordered police to shoot on sight any robbers resisting arrest; however, there were no reports of such incidents during the year.

There was no known action taken against the members of the security forces responsible for shooting, harassing, injuring, assaulting, or otherwise abusing the persons in the following cases from 2000: The June assault of a local embassy employee; the March beating of a local embassy security guard; the February assault of a foreign diplomat; and the February shooting of an LNP officer.

There were credible reports that government forces as well as members of the Lorma ethnic group continued to harass, intimidate, and, on occasion, kill members of the Mandingo ethnic group in Lofa County (see Section 1.a.). In May Amnesty International reported that security forces committed widespread abuses, including killings, torture, beatings, and rape against civilians suspected of supporting armed dissidents and other detainees in Lofa County (see Section 1.a.).

There continued to be reports that rival security personnel clashed violently during the year. For example, in June security officers shot at each other at the port of Monrovia.

Security force personnel in rural areas generally were paid and provisioned inadequately and often extorted money and goods. There were many credible reports that security forces harassed returning refugees and displaced persons, especially in the border areas.

The international community publicly criticized the Government's support for the RUF rebels in Sierra Leone.

Clan chieftains continued to use the traditional practice of trial-by-ordeal to resolve criminal cases in rural areas. The Supreme Court ruled that trial-by-ordeal--commonly the placement of a heated metal object on a suspect's body in an attempt to determine whether the defendant is telling the truth--is unconstitutional; however, the practice continued under an executive order. A local human rights organization sponsored a conference in March 2000 to urge that trial-by-ordeal be abolished throughout the country; however, no further

action was taken.

Prison conditions remained harsh and in some cases life threatening. There were credible reports of unofficial detention facilities, including one at the Executive Mansion, in which detainees were held without charge and in some cases tortured. The Government did not provide detainees or prisoners with adequate food or medical care. Cells at Monrovia Central Prison are overcrowded, mostly with detainees awaiting trial. Only approximately 10 percent of the total prison population has been convicted of criminal offenses. Convicted prisoners and detainees awaiting trial are not held in separate facilities. Similar conditions exist in the Barclay Training Center military stockade. In some counties, the structure that serves as a jail is a container with bars at one end. In May 2000, the wives of 13 Krahn political prisoners held at Monrovia's Central Prison publicly complained about denial of medical care and other abuse of the detainees (see Section 1.e.). There also were reports that local officials forced convicted prisoners to work for them.

Women, who constituted approximately 5 percent of the prison population, were held in separate cells. Their conditions were comparable to those of the male prisoners and detainees. There were no separate facilities for juvenile offenders. Women and particularly juveniles were subject to abuse by guards or other inmates.

In a number of cases, human rights groups and interested individuals achieved the release of detainees and prisoners. However, for the most part, these cases tended to be nonpolitical in nature.

The Government generally permits the independent monitoring of prison conditions by local human rights groups, the media, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC); however, visits to unofficial detention centers often are denied. However, in June the Government allowed members of the U.N. Security Council Expert Panel on Liberia to visit Gbatula base, where victims have been detained and tortured; the Panel did not publish its findings by year's end. The ICRC is allowed to visit persons held in prison facilities and police detention centers without third parties present and to make regular repeat visits.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The Constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention; however, security forces continued at times to arrest and detain persons arbitrarily. The Constitution provides for the rights of the accused, including warrants for arrests and the right of detainees either to be charged or released within 48 hours. Although the Government generally adheres to these standards, warrants were not always based on sufficient evidence, and detainees, especially those without the means to hire a lawyer, often were held for more than 48 hours without charge. In some cases, persons were detained secretly at unofficial detention centers including one at the Executive Mansion (see Section 1.c.).

The Constitution provides for the right of a person who is charged to receive an expeditious trial; however, lengthy pretrial and prearrest detention remained a serious problem. In some cases, the length of the pretrial detention equaled or exceeded the length of sentence for the crime in question. For example, a Ministry of Defense intelligence director, who was arrested and charged with espionage in October 2000, and Auditor General Raleigh Seekie, who was arrested and charged with treason in August 2000, remained in detention at year's end. Police searched Seekie's home and office for subversive documents, arms, and ammunition, but found no incriminating evidence; however, Seekie still was charged with aiding armed dissidents and trying to overthrow the Government. Five detained soldiers awaiting court-martial for desertion during the September 1998 incident have been incarcerated in the stockade since November 1998. Their court-martials still are pending; should they be convicted, the maximum sentence would be 6 months' imprisonment.

The police only have limited logistics and forensic capabilities and cannot adequately investigate many crimes, including murder cases. When the courts release known criminals for lack of evidence, police officers often arrest them again on false charges.

In late September, Liberian Bar Association President Emmanuel Wureh was detained for contempt of Congress for insulting a House member during House Speaker Nuyndeh Morkonmana's corruption hearing. In October he was released from custody following a 1-week boycott of the courts by lawyers. In October National Bar Association Vice President Marcus Jones and Montserrado County Bar President Ishmael Campbell also were detained for contempt of Congress after describing the arrest of Wureh as unconstitutional. On December 24, President Taylor ordered their discharge and they were released.

Security forces arrested and detained a number of journalists and human rights activists during the year (see Section 2.a.). For example, in February the Government arrested and charged with espionage four reporters of the News newspaper for reporting on the purchases of military helicopter spare parts. In response to local and

international pressure, the Government released the journalists in March and no trial occurred. On September 13, the Government arrested and detained for 6 days human rights activist Thomas Ade-Bayer after he criticized the ATU. In an effort to induce the activist to surrender to authorities, the police first detained his wife and 3-year-old child. The activist was released without charge after his lawyer filed a writ of habeas corpus.

Government security forces and the LURD detained, tortured, and killed hundreds of civilians during the year (see Section 1.a.).

The Government did not use forced exile; however, as a result of frequent harassment and threats by the security forces, a number of student activists, opposition figures, and human rights activists fled the country due to fear for their personal safety or that of their families (see Sections 2.a. and 5). In April former Deputy Minister of Information and Presidential Media Advisor J. Milton Teahjay fled the country after he publicly criticized the activities of companies that had been granted concessions by the Government. In May Alphonse Nimene, the leader of the University of Liberia Student Union, and several others also fled the country. In the early part of the year, following the 2000 attack on their office by former civil war combatants, Conmany Wesseh, a prominent NGO Director, and Amos Sawyer, former president of the interim national government in the 1990's, both fled the country; many believe the combatants were acting on orders from the Government or ruling party (see Sections 1.f. and 4). Human rights activist James Torh and Muslim organization leader Lartin Konneh remained outside the country at year's end (see Sections 1.e. and 5). In 2000 President Taylor publicly alleged that some of these opposition figures had gone abroad to conspire in the overthrow of his Government. However, in August the Government announced formally that it had dropped treason, sedition, and terrorism charges against exiled political opponents, including a number of former armed faction leaders of the civil war era, as part of its national reconciliation efforts. In September Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the exiled leader of the Unity Party, who was charged with treason in 2000, visited the country without harm (see Section 3).

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

Although the Constitution provides for an independent judiciary, judges are subjected to political, social, familial, and financial pressures, leading to the corruption of the judiciary. Some judges and magistrates are not lawyers. The judiciary has determined that it is not feasible to retire all judicial personnel who are not legally trained, but intends to replace those currently sitting with lawyers as they retire. By statute members of the bar must be graduates of a law school and pass the bar examination. The executive branch continued to exert undue influence on the judiciary. For example, in June the Supreme Court issued an injunction against the Government's plan to monopolize cargo services at the Port of Monrovia; however, the Government disregarded the injunction.

The judiciary is divided into four levels, with the Supreme Court at the apex. All levels of the court system in Monrovia, including the Supreme Court, functioned sporadically. The Government's efforts to revitalize the court system outside of Monrovia continued to be hindered by a lack of trained personnel, a lack of infrastructure, and inadequate funding. Although judges were assigned throughout the country, in some cases they were unable to hold court due to lack of supplies and equipment. Traditional forms of justice administered by clan chieftains remained prevalent in some localities (see Section 1.c.).

Under the Constitution, defendants have due process rights that conform to internationally accepted standards; however, in practice these rights are not observed always. Defendants have the right to a public trial and timely consultation with an attorney; however, there is no effective system to provide public defenders, especially in rural areas. Some NGO's provide legal services to indigents and others who have no free representation.

Courts regularly received bribes or other illegal gifts out of damages that they awarded in civil cases. Defense attorneys often suggested that their clients pay a gratuity to appease judges, prosecutors, and police officers to secure favorable rulings. In 2000 the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court stated publicly that delays in salary payments to judicial personnel contributed to corruption in the judiciary.

There were long delays in deciding cases involving juveniles.

Human rights organizations reported that 24 political prisoners, including AFL personnel, were sentenced for treason in 1999; however, this number reportedly includes a few political detainees who have not yet been convicted of a crime (see Section 1.d.). In July the Government conferred executive clemency on 3 of 13 ethnic Krahn AFL prisoners, who were convicted in 1999 of treason and sentenced to 20-year sentences. Former presidential adviser Bai Gbala, former senator James Chelley, and former Deputy Justice Minister David Gbala then were released from custody; the cases of the 10 remaining prisoners were under review at year's end. In response to an appeal of the 1999 treason convictions of 13 ethnic Krahn AFL members, the Government demanded in 1999 that their sentences be changed from 10 years' imprisonment to death. In December 2000, 10 years was added to their sentences for a total of 20 years' imprisonment. The Government

permits access to political prisoners by international humanitarian organizations.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Constitution provides for the right of privacy and the sanctity of the home; however, authorities regularly infringed on these rights. The Constitution provides that the police must obtain a warrant, or have a reasonable belief that a crime is in progress, or is about to be committed, before entering a private dwelling. In practice police and paramilitary officers frequently entered private homes and churches without warrants to carry out arrests and investigations. Police also raided the offices of a newspaper during the year (see Section 2.a.).

The security forces harassed and threatened perceived opposition figures and their families by conducting illegal surveillance. In some cases, they entered the homes of opposition figures, usually at night. In March the director of a human rights NGO and an opposition party leader both declared publicly that security forces had threatened to kill them (see Section 1.d.). Some journalists and human rights activists resided in the homes of friends or relatives at times due to fear that the security forces might follow through with their threats against them. Incidents of harassment and threats increased with the continuing violence in Lofa County. In rural areas, particularly in remote parts of Lofa County, armed security forces illegally entered homes, most often to steal food, money, or other property (see Section 1.c.). There were reports that government security forces and rebels forcibly conscripted men and boys to fight in the conflict in Lofa County (see Section 1.a.). Several student leaders remained under surveillance at year's end.

On November 30, ATU members forcibly entered and looted a private residence in Monrovia. Two ATU members reportedly were found with stolen items from the residence; they were arrested and remained in custody at year's end.

On at least one occasion during the year, the Government arrested family members in order to persuade a suspect to turn himself in (see Section 1.d.).

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press; however, the Government restricted these rights in practice. Security agents threatened, detained, and assaulted journalists and intimidated many journalists into practicing self-censorship.

On September 13, the Government arrested and briefly detained human rights activist Thomas Ade-Bayor after he criticized the ATU (see Section 1.d.).

In September the Government deployed police across the country to arrest anyone found selling or buying photographs of Usama Bin Ladin.

The trial of human rights activist James Torh on charges of sedition for criticizing President Taylor, which began in January 2000, continued during the year. Decisions made on motions during his trial indicated that an impartial judgement was not possible and, fearing for his safety, Torh fled the country in March 2000. Muslim organization leader Lartin Konneh, charged with treason for calling on Muslim government officials to resign their positions, also fled the country in 2000. In August the charges against Torh and Konneh were dropped as part of a general amnesty that President Taylor announced for exiles; however, they remained abroad.

In Monrovia eight newspapers were published during the year, although some published very irregularly. Two are independent dailies and five generally appeared once or more a week; they vary in their political balance. The Public Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism publishes one newspaper, and the communications network owned by the President publishes one weekly newspaper. The ruling party also publishes a newspaper.

With some notable exceptions, government officials reluctantly are tolerant of the press; however, they frequently rebuked the media publicly for what they considered negative reporting of events. In April the Minister of Information, Culture, and Tourism publicly urged journalists to portray the country in a positive light; however, there were no reports that the Government acted against journalists who did not do so. The Government also announced the creation of a media advisory committee to reduce tensions between the Government and the press; however, there were no reports that tensions were reduced following its creation. In May the Government announced new requirements for foreign journalists, arguing that the international

media were carrying out a propaganda campaign against the country. The requirements included a minimum 72-hour advance notice of intent to enter the country and a 24-hour waiting period for accreditation after arrival. The Government also ordered local journalists to clear with the Ministry reporting on fighting in the border areas.

Reporting that criticized the Government brought threats of violence, closure, or directives from powerful government figures to advertisers that they should discontinue business with that media outlet.

Management of the one printing facility capable of producing newspapers is subject to pressure from the Government. To meet costs of production, the typical newspaper's eight pages include two or three pages of advertisements or paid announcements, further reducing the amount of news reported. Some articles included are the result of "cadeaux," gifts or money that supplement reporters' meager salaries. The Press Union of Liberia, an independent association of journalists, attempted to open its own printing press; however, the Government did not issue a license and negotiations continued during the year.

In general journalists are outspoken and even provocative; however, journalists also practice self-censorship, especially in regard to information about the President and his immediate family members and particularly after being threatened or harassed.

Newspaper availability fluctuated during the year. The Government in February closed four newspapers because of delinquent tax payments. All reopened by year's end after paying their tax arrears. In July the News newspaper shut down for 2 weeks reportedly because its management feared a raid by police in response to critical reporting on the Government.

Security personnel sometimes interpreted criticism as a license to harass, threaten, arrest, and even assault targeted persons; the Government often required journalists it had arrested to apologize in writing prior to releasing them.

On February 21, the Government arrested and charged with espionage four local journalists for publishing a story on government purchases of helicopter spare parts in 2000 (see Section 1.d.). The four were denied bail; however, after 1 month in detention and before their trial started, the Government released them after receiving written apologies.

In May police raided the offices of the Analyst newspaper, detained for 2 weeks a computer technician, and sought to detain Hassan Bility, the Managing Editor, for alleged contacts with an exiled faction leader. Bility remained in hiding for several weeks until the authorities stated that they had found no evidence of such contacts.

On August 20, the police arrested and detained for 2 days Sam Dean, the Managing Editor of the Monrovia Guardian newspaper, after the publication of an article regarding LNP Director Mulbah's summons to appear for congressional testimony. On August 22, Dean was released after apologizing in writing to Mulbah.

In July journalist Alphonso Toweh charged that police at the port of Monrovia flogged him when he tried to report on the sinking of a cargo ship in the harbor.

On November 20, Wilson Tarpeh, the chairman of The News newspaper, was arrested and detained for 4 days.

Due to the high price of newspapers, the high rate of illiteracy (estimated at 75 percent), high transportation costs, and the poor state of roads elsewhere in the country, newspaper distribution generally is limited to the Monrovia area. As a result, radio is the primary means of mass communication. There are four principal FM stations in Monrovia: Star Radio; two private commercial stations (DC-101); and Radio Veritas, which operated under the Catholic Archdiocese. Star Radio remained closed during the year. There also is the state-run national station (ELBC), and FM and short-wave stations operated by President Taylor's private Liberia Communications Network (LCN). Throughout most of the year, the President's radio station was the only station with a short-wave frequency strong enough to reach all parts of the country. ELBC acquired short-wave equipment in August and planned to begin broadcasting in September; however, by year's end, it had not begun broadcasting on that frequency in spite of the Government's promises. There is a French broadcast through the national radio facility, a religious station (with limited short-wave capacity), and a growing number of small local stations in cities around the country. Unlike in the previous year, there are no religious stations outside Monrovia. Media practitioners believe that the ruling party funds many of these stations.

In March the Government moved to shut down the short-wave broadcasts of Radio Veritas, citing "illegal

operation." The Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications claimed that Radio Veritas applied for and was refused a short-wave license, while the management of Radio Veritas claimed to have documents from the Ministry that granted the station a short-wave license. On September 18, a Monrovia civil court dismissed a suit filed by Radio Veritas against the Government over the denial of the station's short-wave license. Radio Veritas continued to broadcast on the FM band during the year.

Call-in radio talk shows are popular and frequently a forum for both government and opposition viewpoints; however, they sometimes resulted in threats generally from the Government, party leaders, and security agents to the radio hosts and station managers. Interviews with prominent persons are broadcast frequently. In February the ECOM fined the opposition New Democratic Alternative for Liberia Movement (New Deal) \$114 (5,000 Id) for appearing on a radio call-in show, during which it supported the imposition of sanctions against the country. In September the police detained a leading radio talk show host and suspended the station's broadcast for several hours when some callers voiced sentiments contrary to the Government's official policy of sympathy for the September 11 terrorist attacks in the U.S. The talk show host was released the next day.

Due to the economic situation in the country and the dependence on generators requiring expensive fuel purchases, most stations limited broadcasting hours and in some cases ceased operation for short periods.

Television is limited to those who can purchase sets, the generators, and fuel to provide electricity. For those persons and businesses with satellite capability, the Cable News Network is available. There are two television stations: the LCN owned by President Taylor, and the Ducor Broadcasting Corporation, which is privately owned but assisted by President Taylor's generator.

Several new Internet cafes opened in Monrovia; however, access was limited by relatively high fees. The Government continued to charge that its opponents used the Internet to wage a propaganda war; however, in August the Minister of Information stated that the Government would use the Internet to promote a positive image of the country. Many observers believe that the Government blocked the operation of potential Internet service providers (ISP's). In October 2000, another ISP began operating; the head of the ruling party is the chairman of its board of directors.

Because of the ties between the provider and the Government, some potential patrons believed that their use of the Internet was monitored by government security personnel and chose not to use it.

The Government generally respects academic freedom at the University of Liberia; however, in March at the Monrovia campus, police and ATU officers forcibly dispersed what the Government stated was an unauthorized demonstration in support of four detained journalists (see Section 1.d.). Approximately 40 students were beaten and some reportedly were raped (see Section 1.c.). The university administration suspended the leaders of the university student union for 1 year and banned student political activity until the end of July. In May the president of the student union and several others fled the country because of concern for their safety (see Section 1.d.). More than 15 student leaders from the University went into exile following the Justice Minister's public claim that rebel collaborators operated from their campus. Students occasionally protested the lack of resources, which they blamed more on central government appropriation practices than on the university administration.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for the right of peaceful assembly, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however there were some exceptions. In May the Government allowed journalists and supporters to march in Monrovia to commemorate World Press Freedom Day.

In 2000 President Taylor warned that while the Government would tolerate different views, it would not tolerate anarchic demonstrations in the streets.

In March police forcibly dispersed a planned student demonstration (see Sections 1.c. and 2.a.).

The Constitution provides for the right of association, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government's Electoral Commission (ECOM) threatened several times during the year to take action against the Collaborating Political Parties (CPP), an association of opposition parties, arguing that the Constitution barred such "coalitions" except during official election campaigns; however, the ECOM did not take any action by year's end.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there were some exceptions.

There is no established state religion. However, government ceremonies invariably open and close with prayer and may include the singing of a hymn. The prayers and hymns are usually Christian but occasionally are Muslim. In March President Taylor sponsored the travel of more than 100 pilgrims to Mecca. Some non-Muslims criticized this action as a waste of scarce resources.

All organizations, including religious groups, must register their articles of incorporation with the Government, along with a statement of the purpose of the organization; however, traditional indigenous religious groups are not required to register, and generally do not register. Registration is routine, and there have been no reports that the registration process is burdensome or discriminatory in its administration.

The law prohibits religious discrimination; however, Islamic leaders complained of discrimination against Muslims. Although there are some Muslims in senior government positions, many Muslims believe that they are bypassed for desirable jobs. Many Muslim business proprietors believe that the Government's decision to enforce an old statute prohibiting business on Sunday discriminated against them. Most Mandingos, and hence most Muslims, allied with factions that opposed Taylor during the civil war and still belong to opposition parties.

Two FM radio stations, one operated by the Roman Catholic archdiocese (Radio Veritas), the other an evangelical station, broadcast Christian-oriented religious programming from Monrovia to the capital and the surrounding area (see Section 2.a.). There are no Islamic-oriented radio stations in the country due to the lack of financial resources in the northern and western counties, where the Islamic population is concentrated.

Government forces have been accused of serious human rights abuses against suspected rebels and sympathizers in fighting in Lofa County during the year. The Government contends that the insurgents largely are Mandingo Muslims of the ULIMO-K faction that fought against President Charles Taylor's forces during the civil war. The Government has not taken actions openly against Muslims in Lofa County; however, its inaction over reports of abuses in Lofa County contributed to ethnic tension between Muslim and non-Muslim ethnic groups in that area of the country.

In 2000 Muslim activist Lartin Konneh was arrested on charges of treason after he called upon Muslims to resign their government jobs in protest of the Government's inaction since the burning of five mosques in Lofa County in 2000 (see Section 1.e.).

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The Constitution provides for these rights; however, the Government restricted them in practice. Security forces maintained checkpoints where travelers routinely were subjected to arbitrary searches and petty extortion. Security forces were also accused of beating and robbing internally displaced persons (IDP's) fleeing fighting in Lofa County. Security forces also extorted money from returning refugees. In February and October, units of the ATB, citing security concerns, set up temporary checkpoints that interdicted traffic and visitors to a foreign embassy in Monrovia; at year's end, the checkpoints remained in operation.

On June 17, a local embassy employee was shot and injured at a checkpoint; he received medical treatment abroad.

In 2000 ostensibly in order to curtail the illegal use of national travel documents, President Taylor ordered that passport applicants be cleared by the National Security Agency (NSA). Opposition parties and human rights organizations criticized this directive, arguing that it violated the constitutional right of freedom of travel. Reportedly this executive order was not enforced during the year. In 2000 the Government announced that it would no longer accept Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) safe conduct documents as valid travel documents for entering the country; however, reportedly this was not enforced.

As a result of the civil war, there were nearly 157,000 IDP's in approximately 36 camps in 1997. International agencies and the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) have been able to resettle approximately 126,000 displaced persons since 1998. In October the fighting in northern Lofa County further increased the number of displaced persons. There were an estimated 30,000 IDP's in the country at year's end. International and local NGO's had limited funding and resources to assist these IDP's. The U.N. High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that, at year's end, there were approximately 81,000 Liberian refugees in Guinea, 120,000 in Cote d'Ivoire, 10,000 in Ghana, 7,000 in Sierra Leone, and 2,000 in Nigeria.

The law provides for the granting of refugee and asylum status in accordance with the provisions of the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The Government continued to provide first asylum to nearly 86,000 refugees, the vast majority of whom were from Sierra Leone. The Government generally cooperated with the Office of the UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees.

In January in response to mounting international pressure, the Government announced that it would expel former RUF leader Sam Bockarie and his followers from the country, where they had taken refuge early in December 1999. President Taylor denied that the Government was training the RUF fighters or that it has been supplying them with arms. In March the Government announced that Bockarie had departed the country; however, Bockarie's actual whereabouts remained unknown and it was believed widely that hundreds of RUF personnel remained part of the Government's security forces.

The whereabouts of seven returning refugees arrested in June 2000 by security personnel remained unknown (see Section 1.b.).

In 1999 after a series of raids and attacks by security forces and dissidents bases in Guinea, a group of Sierra Leonean refugees migrated south from northern Lofa County towards another established refugee camp in Sinje. The Government cooperated with the UNHCR's efforts to assist the migration to the new location. International donors remained unwilling to send any further assistance to Lofa County, and the international and domestic NGO's are reluctant to resume operations there because of security concerns. The Government and the UNHCR established a second refugee camp in Sinje, a location easily accessible from Monrovia, to accommodate the refugees from Lofa County. At year's end, approximately 34,000 refugees from Sierra Leone remained in refugee camps in the country. There were no reports of the forced return of persons to a country where they feared persecution.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The Constitution provides for the right to vote in free and fair elections, and citizens exercised this right in 1997 in elections that international observers deemed administratively free and transparent; however, the elections were conducted in an atmosphere of intimidation, as most voters believed that military forces loyal to Charles Taylor would have resumed the civil war if Taylor lost the election. Since the legislative elections were held on the basis of proportional representation, Taylor's National Patriotic Party won control of the legislature by the same 75 percent majority that he received in the popular vote for the presidency. The 1997 legislative and presidential elections were held under a special election law in accordance with the terms of the Abuja Peace Process.

The legislature did not exercise genuine independence from the executive branch. There were 16 opposition parties, most of which had little popular support outside of the capital, and opposition legislators, who held only one-quarter of the seats in the House of Representatives and in the Senate, generally were more passive than members of the ruling NPP. Congressional committees failed to develop expertise in their respective areas of responsibility. No major legislation was enacted during the year. In September the House of Representatives suspended its Speaker, pending investigation of corruption charges against him by another representative. The Speaker admitted wrongdoing and resigned; however, in October he was reinstated. The House also charged the Speaker's lawyer with contempt, which resulted in his detention (see Section 1.d.).

Constitutionally the Senate must approve presidential nominees; however, in April the executive branch confirmed a new Deputy Minister of Rural Development for Community Services even though the Senate had rejected her.

In August the Government announced the dropping of treason, sedition and terrorism charges against exiled political opponents, including Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, Alhaji Kromah, and Roosevelt Johnson (see Section 1.d.).

The State is highly centralized. The President appoints the superintendents (governors) of the 15 counties; the Government created 2 new counties during the year. Municipalities and chieftaincies are supposed to elect their own officials, but elections, postponed in 1998 due to lack of funds and disorganization, were not held by year's end for the same reason. Local governments at all levels have no independent revenue base and rely entirely on the central Government for funds. Education, health services, and public works are provided by the central Government. Local officials serve mainly to lobby the central Government.

The percentage of women in government and politics does not correspond to their percentage of the population; however, there are no restrictions on the participation of women in politics, and several women held ranking positions in the Government. Five of the 26 senators and 5 of the 64 members of the House of

Representatives are women. Of the 20 cabinet positions, 4 are held by women, including the Minister for Gender and Development, a position created in April. A woman serves as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and another chairs the National Reconciliation Commission. There are no women's caucuses, but the ruling party has a women's organization.

The percentage of Muslims in government and politics does not correspond to their percentage of the population; one cabinet minister is a Muslim.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A number of domestic and international human rights groups generally operate without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases; however, members of the security forces often harassed domestic democracy and human rights activists. For example, in March the director of a domestic human rights NGO reported receiving threats after his organization issued a report critical of the Government's human rights record. In June President Taylor stated that he may force some NGO's to leave the country, charging that some NGO's, under the guise of providing food relief for IDP's from Lofa County, were conducting intelligence operations; however, there were no reports that he forced any NGO's to leave the country during the year. In September the Government arrested activist Thomas Ade-Bayer when he criticized the ATU (see Section 1.d.).

Domestic human rights organizations are underfunded and understaffed, and their personnel lacked adequate training. There are three coalitions of human rights groups: The National Human Rights Center of Liberia has eight member organizations; eight other groups comprise the Network of Human Rights Chapters; and four belong to the Federation of Human Rights Organizations. All of these organizations sought to increase public discussion of human rights problems.

Some human rights groups paid regular visits to detainees at police headquarters and prisoners at the Monrovia Central Prison (see Section 1.c.). Several domestic human rights organizations have established branches outside of the capital and perform similar monitoring functions there. No discernible pattern of government interference with these activities emerged.

There were no further developments in the prosecution of eight former civil war combatants who were arrested after the November 2000 ransacking of the offices of the Center for Democratic Empowerment (CEDE) and the beating of former interim president and human rights defender Amos Sawyer and the organization's executive director, Conmany Wesseh. Both Sawyer and Wessen left the country during the year (see Section 1.d.).

The Government permits international NGO's and human rights organizations to operate in the country, and a few international organizations did so during the year. However, the Government strongly criticized Amnesty International's findings of widespread abuses by security forces fighting dissidents in Lofa County. In November the Carter Center, an international democracy and human rights organization, requested a formal invitation to return to the country; however, the NGO did not receive a formal invitation by year's end. In November 2000, the Carter Center terminated its programs in the country and stated in a letter to President Taylor that it was leaving the country because of conditions in the country and the Government's poor human rights record.

The Government's Human Rights Commission remained inactive throughout the year. It received no funding from the Government, and the Senate again failed to confirm the appointments of three of its five commissioners. The chairman of the Commission fled the country in August 1999. In July commission members publicly called for the Government to provide funding and approve the appointment of independent commissioners.

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Religion, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on ethnic background, race, sex, creed, place of origin, or political opinion; however, discrimination exists. There are no laws against gender discrimination, ethnic discrimination, or female genital mutilation (FGM). Differences involving ethnic groups, notably the Krahn and Mandingo ethnic groups, continued to contribute to serious political violence and abuses.

Women

Domestic violence against women is extensive; however, it was not addressed seriously as a problem by the Government, the courts, or the media. Several NGO's in Monrovia and Buchanan continued programs to treat

abused women and girls and increase awareness of their rights.

FGM, which is condemned widely by international public health experts as damaging to both physical and psychological health, traditionally was performed on young girls in northern, western, and central ethnic groups, particularly in rural areas. Prior to the onset of the civil war in 1989, approximately 50 percent of women in rural areas between the ages of 8 and 18 were subjected to FGM. A local organization, Human Rights Watch Women and Children, which does not receive government funding, launched a campaign during the year to eradicate FGM. The Association of Female Lawyers in Liberia (AFELL) also has spoken out against FGM.

Social structures and traditional institutions, such as the secret societies that often performed FGM as an initiation rite, were undermined by the war. While many experts believe that the incidence of FGM dropped to as low as 10 percent by the end of the war, traditional societies are reestablishing themselves throughout the country, and the increase in the incidence of FGM continued. The most extreme form of FGM, infibulation, reportedly is not practiced. The Government has taken no action against FGM.

The status of women varies by region, ethnic group, and religion. Before the outbreak of the civil war, women held one-fourth of the professional and technical jobs in Monrovia. On the whole, women have not recovered from the setbacks caused by the civil war, when most schools were closed, and they could not carry out their traditional roles in the production, allocation, and sale of food.

Women married under civil law can inherit land and property; however, women married under traditional laws are considered the properties of their husbands and are not entitled to inherit from their husbands or retain custody of their children if their husbands die. Women's organizations continued to press for legislation on behalf of inheritance rights in traditional marriages. There continued to be few programs to help former combatants reintegrate into society, and there were none specifically to benefit former female combatants. However, several women's organizations advanced family welfare issues, helped promote political reconciliation, and assisted in rehabilitating both former female combatants and women who were victims of the civil war. The Liberian chapter of the Mano River Women's Peace Network visited neighboring countries during the year to promote regional peace and stability.

Throughout the year, professional women's groups—including lawyers, market women, and businesswomen—remained vocal about their concerns regarding government corruption, the economy, security abuses, rape, domestic violence, and children's rights. Government officials often responded negatively to public criticism. There were credible reports of harassment and possible surveillance of outspoken critics (see Section 1.f.). In March the Government created the Ministry for Gender and Development, whose mandate included the promotion of the well-being of women and girls.

Children

The Government generally was unable to provide for the education and health of children, although it continued its nationwide anti-polio vaccination campaign during the year. Due to the poor condition of government schools, many children, particularly in Monrovia, who attended school went to private institutions. Since many private schools still need to be refurbished due to wartime damage, school fees were increased significantly, thereby making education unattainable for many school-age children. In both public and private schools, families of children often were asked to provide their own books, pencils, and paper. At the end of 2000, 741,816 out of an estimated 1.5 million school age children were enrolled in primary and secondary schools, less than half of whom were girls. Expenditures on education were estimated at \$6.3 million (247 million Id). In 1995 the literacy rate for boys was 53.9 percent for boys and 22.4 percent for girls.

Young persons were victimized seriously during the civil war. An estimated 50,000 children were killed; many more were injured, orphaned, or abandoned. Approximately 100 underfunded orphanages operate in and around Monrovia; however, many orphans live outside these institutions. The National Military Families Association of Liberia (NAMFA) tries to provide for orphaned military children; it has registered 650 street children. These institutions do not receive any government funding, but rely on public donations. Nearly all youths witnessed terrible atrocities, and some committed atrocities themselves. Approximately 21 percent (4,306) of the combatants who disarmed under the provisions of the Abuja Peace Accords were child soldiers under the age of 17. Many youths remain traumatized, and some still are addicted to drugs. The number of street children in Monrovia and the number of abandoned infants increased significantly following disarmament. NGO's and UNICEF continued retraining and rehabilitation programs for a limited number of former child fighters; however, these children were vulnerable to being recruited in subregional conflicts, since most had no other means of support. The armed forces continued to recruit forcibly underage soldiers.

FGM is performed primarily on girls (see Section 5, Women).

Child advocacy groups reported forced child labor in the rural areas of the country (see Section 6.c.).

A well-known 17-year-old child rights activist, who fled the country in January 2000 to escape persistent harassment of himself, his family, teachers, and high school classmates by security personnel, remained in self-imposed exile at year's end.

Persons with Disabilities

As a result of the civil war, a large number of persons have permanent disabilities, in addition to those disabled by accident or illness. It is illegal to discriminate against persons with disabilities; however, in practice they do not enjoy equal access to public buildings or government services. No laws mandate accessibility to public buildings or services. Persons with disabilities face discrimination, particularly in rural areas. Deformed babies often are abandoned. Some NGO's provide services to persons with disabilities.

Religious Minorities

Some tensions exist between the major religious communities. The law prohibits religious discrimination; however, Islamic leaders complained of societal discrimination against Muslims. The private sector in urban areas, particularly in the capital, gives preference to Christianity in civic ceremonies and observances, and discrimination against followers of other organized religions spills over into areas of individual opportunity and employment. There is an interfaith council that brings together leaders of the Christian and Islamic faiths.

Tensions continued in Lofa County between the predominantly Muslim Mandingo ethnic group and the Lorma ethnic group. By year's end, the Government had not yet released a report on the burning of five mosques in Lofa County in January 2000.

Ritual killings, in which body parts used in traditional indigenous rituals are removed from the victim, continued to occur. The number of such killings is difficult to ascertain, since police often describe deaths as accidents even when body parts have been removed. Deaths that appear to be natural or accidental sometimes are rumored to be the work of ritual killers. Little reliable information is readily available about traditions associated with ritual killings. It is believed that practitioners of traditional indigenous religions among the Grebo and Krahn ethnic groups concentrated in the southeastern counties most commonly engage in ritual killings. The victims are usually members of the religious group performing the ritual. Body parts of a member whom the group believes to be powerful are believed to be the most effective ritually. Body parts most frequently removed include the heart, liver, and genitals. The rituals involved have been reported in some cases to entail eating body parts, and the underlying religious beliefs may be related to incidents during the civil war in which faction leaders sometimes ate (and in which one faction leader had himself filmed eating) body parts of former leaders of rival factions. Removal of body parts for use in traditional rituals is believed to be the motive for ritual killings, rather than an abuse incidental to killings committed for other motives. Ritual murders for the purpose of obtaining body parts traditionally were committed by religious group members called "heart men." However, since the civil war, common criminals inured to killing also may sell body parts. In August 1999, the Government sent a high-level delegation of the National Police to the southeastern counties to investigate reports of ritual killings. There were no reports released from this investigation. In July the Government deployed units of the ATU to Maryland County to help stem a wave of ritual killings, and the reported incidence of ritualistic killings had decreased by year's end.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Although the Constitution bans ethnic discrimination, it also provides that only "persons who are Negroes or of Negro descent" may be citizens or own land. Many persons of Lebanese and Asian descent who were born or have lived most of their lives in the country are denied full rights as a result of this racial distinction.

The country is ethnically diverse. The population is made up of 16 indigenous ethnic groups. The Americo-Liberian minority--descendants of freed slaves from the United States and the Caribbean--dominated the government and the public sector through the True Whig party until 1980. The indigenous ethnic groups generally speak distinct primary languages, and they are concentrated regionally. No ethnic group constitutes a majority of the population.

Many members of the predominantly Muslim Mandingo minority encountered hostility when they sought to return, after the end of the civil war, to their villages in Lofa, Bong, and Nimba counties. Many Mandingos were unable to reoccupy their homes, which had been taken over by squatters. Members of the Lorma, Gio, and Mano minorities generally held all Mandingos responsible for atrocities committed by the ULIMO-Mandingo faction during the civil war. The lack of competent security forces and a fully functioning judiciary in these

areas prevented many Mandingos from seeking redress. Mandingo citizens faced growing discrimination, arbitrary arrests, and violence based on their ethnicity (see Sections 1.a. and 1.c.).

The continuing cross-border violence in Lofa County exacerbated ethnic tensions between the Mandingos and the Lormas (see Section 1.a.).

Recent tension with the Guinean Government aggravated unrest in Nimba between the Manos and Mandingos; however, there were no new reports of tension between Manos and Mandingos during the year.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The Constitution provides that workers, except members of the military and police, have the right to associate in trade unions, and workers are allowed to join unions in practice. The Constitution also provides that unions are prohibited from engaging in partisan political activity. However, government interference in union activities, especially union elections and leaderships struggles, was common both before and during the civil war.

Although most economic activity was interrupted by the war, unions proliferated. There are approximately 30 functioning unions organized loosely under two umbrella groups--the Federation of Liberian Trade Unions and the Congress of Liberian Trade Unions--with the common objective of protecting the rights of their 60,000 members, who largely were unemployed. The actual power that the unions exercise was extremely limited. Since the country's work force is largely illiterate, economic activities beyond the subsistence level were very limited, and the labor laws tend to favor management.

During the year, the Government strictly enforced the union registration requirements that fell into disuse during the war.

Labor laws provide for the right to strike. A decree passed by the People's Redemption Council in 1984 outlawed strikes, but it was not enforced during the year. Due to the destruction of the economy and the estimated 85 percent unemployment rate, strikes were infrequent.

On January 29 in Monrovia, taxi and commercial drivers staged a peaceful 1-day strike to protest rising gasoline prices.

Labor unions traditionally have been affiliated with international labor groups such as the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

With the exception of civil servants, workers (including employees of public corporations and autonomous agencies) have the right to organize and bargain collectively. In the past, agreements were negotiated freely between workers and their employers without government interference; however, these rights were largely moot during the year because of the lack of economic activity.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The Constitution prohibits forced or compulsory labor; however, this prohibition was ignored widely in many parts of the country, such as rural areas where farmers were pressured into providing free labor on "community projects" that often benefited only local leaders. There were allegations that large logging companies in the southeast forcibly recruited workers. There also were reports that local officials forced convicted prisoners to work for them. There were reports during the year that local government officials forced persons to work without compensation on President Taylor's farm.

The Constitution prohibits forced and bonded labor by children; however, there were reports that it occurred (see Section 5). Some former combatants, including some in the security forces, were accused of forcing children to work in the mining industry. In 1999 a child rights advocacy group released a report on forced child labor in the southeastern counties. The advocacy group's report and that of another prominent human rights group contradicted an earlier government report that failed to find any conclusive evidence of forced child

labor. Subsequently legislators from three counties sued the child rights advocacy group for defaming the counties' reputations. At year's end, the case still was pending.

d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibits the employment of children under the age of 16 during school hours in the wage sector, but enforcement traditionally is lax. The Ministry of Labor did not make any inspections during the year and lacks the resources to carry out its mandate. Throughout rural areas--particularly where there were no schools--small children continued to assist their parents as vendors in local markets or on the streets, to take care of younger brothers and sisters, and to work on family subsistence farms.

The Government has not ratified ILO Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labor.

The Constitution prohibits forced and bonded labor by children; however, there were reports that it occurred (see Section 6.c.).

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

The law provides for a minimum wage, paid leave, severance benefits, and safety standards, but enforcement was targeted solely against profitable firms that generally observed these standards. Due to the country's continued economic problems, most citizens were forced to accept any work they could find regardless of wages or working conditions. The Ministry of Labor did not have the resources to monitor compliance with labor laws.

The law requires a minimum wage of approximately \$0.25 (10 ld) per hour not exceeding 8 hours per day, excluding benefits, for unskilled laborers. The law requires that agricultural workers be paid \$1.50 (60 ld) for an 8-hour day, excluding benefits. Skilled labor has no minimum fixed wage, but industrial workers usually received three or four times the wage paid to agricultural workers. The much-sought-after minimum wage jobs provided a minimal standard of living for a worker and family; however, there were very few such jobs. Families dependent on minimum wage incomes also engage in subsistence farming, small-scale marketing, petty extortion, and begging. By mid-year the Government owed civil servants 9 months worth of salary arrears; however, in June the Ministry of Finance began paying the arrears.

The law provides for a 48-hour, 6-day regular workweek with a 30-minute rest period per 5 hours of work. The 6-day workweek may extend to 56 hours for service occupations and to 72 hours for miners, with overtime pay beyond 48 hours.

There are government-established health and safety standards, enforced in theory by the Ministry of Labor. Even under the law, workers do not have a specific right to remove themselves from dangerous situations without risking loss of employment.

f. Trafficking in Persons

The law does not prohibit trafficking in persons; however, there were no reports that persons were trafficked to, from, or within the country.